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Date: Thu, 8 Apr 1999 10:11:18 -0700
To: Harold_Varmus@nih.gov
From: "Patrick O. Brown" <pbrown@cmgm.stanford.edu>
Subject: Re: comments on latest E-biomed draft

Hi Harold,

I just realized that I neglected to mention in my comments on your proposal one additional goal that I think should definitely be included. (And that should be part of the actual plan). That is to convert the already published material in Medline to digital text and image format, with hyperlinked citations - starting with the most recent, highest-impact, most-used, journals and working back to include as much as possible of the entire published record. This will involve obtaining the copyrights (in general shouldn't cost much, as the market value of scientific papers to the publishers decays precipitously with time), and paying for the conversion (probably less than \$100M to do all of Medline, and correspondingly less to begin with just the most recent and "important" journals). The cost of this conversion would pay for itself in productivity gains, library costs, etc. probably within a year, and I think the arguments can be made pretty compelling on economic grounds alone. The real reason for doing it though, is that it will allow scientists, or anyone, for the first time, to move seamlessly through the entire body of published "knowledge" in the life sciences as they follow and develop their ideas, make connections, search for resources. The rapidly developing text-searching tools (and under-development image searching tools) could potentially be used to find even buried nuggets of information that could never be found by any bibliographic tracking method. In addition to the practical and economic benefits, it would be a tremendous "gift" to the whole world - (think of how much year old print copies of journals are valued at medical schools in the third world - this would give every library with an internet connection access to the same body of literature that the only very best and richest libraries have now).

Please let me know if you would like to meet on Wednesday afternoon next week.

Relentlessly yours,

Pat

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